

Castlemaine Naturalist



JUNE 1990 #157

INDIAN MYNAH GETS CLOSER!

The Indian Mynah is one of the pest birds of southern Victoria, and members of the Club have for many years noted its gradual approach to Castlemaine.

It has been fairly common at Taradale for some time. Mynahs have the habit of feeding at the roadside verges, so they are easy to see. In last months Castlemaine Naturalist, it was reported that a flock of about 40 were seen between Elphinstone and Malmsbury.

The latest sighting is for Blackjack Road, Barkers Creek, near the junction with the Midland Highway. A single bird was noticed on May 26th. Perhaps the Mynahs will make their way to Castlemaine via Barkers Creek rather than through Chewton.

A few days earlier, three Mynahs were seen in Fogarty's Gap Road, near the corner with the Calder Highway. So no doubt residents of Bendigo can also expect them.

The bird is also known as the Common Myna. Apparently the final h can be dropped if desired.

An Indian Mynahs are easy to recognise. It is about the size of a Blackbird, and has a glossy black head and throat, a cocoa-brown body and a yellow bill and has a distinctive strutting or hopping gait.

It is a bird we could do without. It can form large flocks of a thousand or more. It is a scavenger as well as raiding soft fruit and berries.

Keep your eye out for the first birds in the Castlemaine boundaries.

THE ROAD TO ALICE SPRINGS

Recently, on an urgent trip to Alice Springs, I had the good fortune to be travelling on bus that broke down. The driver said "this could take some time to fix" - moans and a cry for a video. I headed for the door with hat and binoculars.

We were about half way between Coober Pedy and the Northern Territory border. The country was flat, treeless, a scraggy shrub here and there, low-growing bushes and grass - utterly boring at first glance, but a closer look revealed a field naturalists delight.

It was impossible to count the different varieties of vegetation, every shade of green and grey, many tiny flowers, so small visible only down on ones knees, tiny seed pods, some little tussocks of grass (?) all facing the one direction (north). A couple of passengers were equally as interested as I was and we regretted not knowing something of what we were seeing.

The birds were few. A couple of Richard's Pipits (which I tried to turn into Australian Pratincole. Small flocks of little birds were flitting from bush to bush, but always too far away to identify.

Three Black Kites (Fork-tailed) probably after the numerous dead kangaroos along the roadside.

An Australian Kestrel, hovering, and making an occasional dive, and coming up empty handed.

Seven kangaroos in the distance, two big reds among them.

It was a pleasant hour and a half.

On the return journey four days later, the area was almost under water, and the rain still coming down. It should be a wonderful spring up there.

M.O.

NODDING SALTBUCK

A plant specimen sent for naming from a Castlemaine house block has been identified as Nodding Saltbush, (or *Einadia nutans*).

It is moderately common in the district, and is often found growing at the base of trees. It occurs in Kaweka, where it still persists in the area near Hargraves street that is dominated by introduced grasses.

It is readily recognised by the



shape of the leaves, which often have small lobes at the base. It has small red berries in autumn, which help make it an ornamental plant.

NOTES FOR MAY

YELLOW BILLED SPOONBILL. A pair were seen soaring over Castlemaine on 10/5/90. They gradually moved off in a NNE direction.

NEW BIRD AREA RECORDS include Little Eagle, Restless Flycatcher, Speckled Warbler, Little Thornbill, Striated Thornbill, Varied Sittella and White-winged Chough (all for Mt Alexander), Common Myna (Barkers Creek), Cattle Egrets (Barkers Creek (area w)).

AUSTRALIAN HOBBY and WHITE-FACED HERON. A Hobby was watched while it swooped over a White-faced Heron, on a dam on the Muckleford School Road on 15/5/90. The heron became rather alarmed at this, and hurried to the bank and took shelter in rushes near the edge. The Heron was larger than the Hobby, but Pizzey's bird book states that the Hobby sometimes attacks quite large birds, such as the Heron.

LITTLE RAVENS AT CASTLEMAINE NORTH. A large flock of Little Ravens was seen (and heard) near Sawmill road on May 25th by R. Mills. The Australian Raven is much more common near Castlemaine. The Little Raven, unlike the Australian Raven, is often found in large flocks, and is the common raven further south, for example, at Ballarat.

CATTLE EGRETS AT BARKERS CREEK. A small group of Cattle Egrets was seen near the corner of White Gum Road and the highway at Barkers Creek on May 25th, by a number of Club members. In breeding plumage, the Cattle Egret has orange feathers on the breast. These egrets were in the non-breeding, all-white plumage. As is quite common, they were following cattle.

SWIFT PARROTS. Many swiftly-flying parrots were noticed in the Gower - Smith's Reef forest on May 19th, by G. Broadway, and thought to have probably been Swift Parrots. Shortly after this, a flock of several dozen were observed perched in a tree, where they could be positively identified.

MORE WOOD DUCK AT FRYERSTOWN. A flock, this time of about 90, has been seen at a Fryerstown dam by C & C. Norwood.

WEDGE-TAILED EAGLE was observed soaring over the town in the vicinity of Norwood Hill late on a mid-May afternoon.

A DRY AUTUMN. Local reservoirs are at a very low level. Cairn Curran, Tullaroop and Laanacoorie are all very low, and Bells Swamp is dry. Autumn orchids have not been

conspicuous. Small autumn leek orchids have were seen earlier, and a few Parson's Bands further south (past the Doxa Camp). Reports from readers about autumn or early winter orchids are invited.

WIRILDA IN FLOWER AT VAUGHAN. Although there are few autumn flowers, an occasional Wirilda (*Acacia retinodes*) has been seen in flower near the entrance to the Vaughan Springs Reserve. Silky Hakea is also in flower.

ALTERATIONS TO THE BIRD LIST

This article gives alterations to Castlemaine Bird List Edition 4, published by the Club in December 1987.

Additions to the list are:-

LITTLE BITTERN. It was observed at Bells Swamp in 1987 by Garry Cheers.

AUSTRALIAN DARTER. It has been seen in a number of areas, such as Cairn Curran, Harcourt North Reservoir, Fryers town and the Botanic Gardens.

GLOSSY IBIS. Seen at Cairn Curran and Bells Swamp.

CAPE BARREN GOOSE. A rare migrant. Some stayed at Clydesdale for several days during 1988, and a small flock was seen at Odgers Road, Castlemaine in 1990.

BLUE-BILLED DUCK. Seen at Cairn Curran and Harcourt North Reservoir.

SPOTTED HARRIER. Seen at Cairn Curran and Bells Swamp

MARSH HARRIER. (better known as the Swamp Harrier. It has also been seen at Bells Swamp and Cairn Curran.

BUSH THICK-KNEE. Has been seen in the Sandon Forest and also at Walmer.

Birds originally listed as "Unusual and Rare Sightings" and now added to the main list are:-

SPINY-CHEEKED HONEYEATER. Recorded by D. Plant and K. Turner at Campbells Creek.

BLACK-FACED WOODSWALLOW. Seen at Gower in 1981 by M. Oliver.

SQUARE-TAILED KITE. Seen by D. Franklin and others at Gower in 1986 and T. Holland at Guildford.

Birds added to "Unusual and Rare Sightings" are:-

EMU. There are various historical records, and some are kept on farms (e.g. at Coliban Park at Sutton Grange).

WHITE-BELLIED SEA-EAGLE. Seen at Cairn Curran by G Cheers.

PEA-FOWL. An introduced ornamental bird.

BEAUTIFUL FIRETAIL. Recorded by L. Grant for Muckleford Forest.

PLAINS WANDERER. A 1987 record for Newstead by G. Cheers

BROLGA. There have been occasional reports of Brolgas e.g. for the Moolort Plains. Members of Bendigo F.N.C. saw some flying overhead at Harcourt in 1990.

TURQUOISE PARROT. There have been many reports of past sightings in the Gower - Maldon area.

GREENSHANK. This wader has been seen at Cairn Curran by G. Cheers

PINK ROBIN. Brown-plumaged birds were seen in the Sandon Forest in 1989 by G. Cheers.

Copies of the new bird list can be obtained at meetings, or ordered from E. Perkins.

New area records, and comments about birds on the list are invited.

BIRD WATCHING AT GOWER

Birds have been particularly numerous at Gower over autumn. On a visit on May 27th, the air was full of the sounds of birds, particularly of Striated Pardalotes, Fuscous Honeyeaters and Wattle Birds.

In the trees along Pullens Road, there was constant movement among the tree branches, and this movement extending far into the bush.

Fuscous Honeyeaters were perhaps the most noticeable. They are rather similar to the White-plumed Honeyeater, but are much darker about the face, and the plume is less conspicuous. They spend much of their time chasing each other and chasing other birds. Yellow-faced Honeyeaters were also numerous, and flocks of White-naped Honeyeaters were also seen.

In the old dry dam to the south of the road, there were dozens of Silver Eyes and Red-browed Finches, and an occasional Blue Wren feeding and flitting about.

Several Yellow Robins were in the area. Often the Fuscous Honeyeaters would draw attention to them, by their attacks. Other birds seen included Bronze-winged Pigeons, Eastern Shrike Tits, Golden Whistlers, Brown Thornbills, and Brown Treecreepers.

Only one Swift Parrot was seen and at one time a flock of Eastern Rosellas flew in. Later on a single Crimson Rosella flew across the road.

Yellow-tufted Honeyeaters were less common than on some occasions at Gower, but are easily seen as they are constantly on the move, and tend to spend more time lower down. A number were feeding in Coffee Bush, and could be seen as they from time to time flew a few metres vertically, before going back to the Coffee Bush.

Wattle Birds are numerous throughout the Muckleford Forest at present, attracted no doubt by the flowering of the Yellow Gums and Ironbarks.

High on one of the Yellow Gums a Bell Bird perched for several minutes. It is also easy to recognise with its white face with black surrounds.

At one of the dams near the Red White and Blue Mine we were able to watch honeyeaters bathing. The Yellow Tufteds made the best show, with often up to a dozen bathing. They could be seen fly in, and perch on a nearby shrub, before going down to the water's edge, where they would sit in the water for a few seconds. Other honeyeaters were also at the dam. The White-napeds would fly over the water, and were apparently drinking on the wing. The Fuscous Honeyeaters were near the Yellow-tufteds, where they would drink, but not bathe.

WHERE TO SEE BIRDS NEAR CASTLEMAINE

"Birds and Where to Find them in Australia" by John Bransbury is one of the books that all bird watchers should own. It is now available at reduced price at some of the discount book shops.

This article, however, describes some of the good bird watching areas near Castlemaine. Readers will no doubt know of other, and perhaps even better places. If so, they are asked to contribute this information.

WATER BIRDS

The local reservoirs can have a wide range of birds. Generally the largest range of birds can be seen in shallow, and isolated, parts.

CAIRN CURRAN.

The old highway leads to the edge of the reservoir. To reach it, travel through Newstead on the Pyrenees Highway, over the railway crossing and about a kilometre further on turn right along a narrow road. Cross the railway line and turn left along the old highway to the reservoir. The water is fairly shallow at this part, and dead trees provide perches.

The road along the west side of the reservoir also has some good viewing areas. Continue along the main highway towards Maryborough, cross the Joyce's Creek bridge and then turn right, along the western edge of the reservoir. The road at some places passes very close to the reservoir. A few kilometres further on, a road leads off to the right to a small picnic area. The road continues on to Baringup.

BARKERS CREEK RESERVOIR.

This reservoir is also known as Harcourt North Reservoir. From Harcourt, follow the road past the Harcourt school and continue on to Harcourt North, and around the east

side of the reservoir, where there is a small parking area. Good walking boots are an advantage. Birds are often plentiful both to the north and south of this point. It is possible, if the reservoir is not too high, to walk around the reservoir.

There is a picnic area towards the south-west corner of the dam, with toilets and other facilities. Anglers are often to be found in this vicinity, and birds tend to move to other parts of the reservoir.

TULLAROOP RESERVOIR

Tullaroop has large bird populations at some times of the year. From the picnic area near the spillway, continue west, past the dam wall and turn left along a gravel road. The road leads to a small peninsular (or island if the dam is very full). Some of the areas near here are fairly shallow. Mountain Shelduck may be particularly plentiful.

The small church near the peninsular is still in use.

BELLS SWAMP

Bells Swamp is on the Maldon - Dunolly Road, about 11 km from Maldon. The swamp is likely to dry up after a long dry spell. It usually has a range of water birds, some of which breed. Undergrowth provides shelter for the birds, and patience can be rewarded with sightings of uncommon birds.

(To be continued)

Meetings are held on the second Friday of each month at Castlemaine High School at 8.00 p.m. Business meetings on the fourth Thursday at 38 Campbell St at 7.30 p.m. All members invited. Visitors are invited to attend the Club's sessions.

SUPPER ROSTER

June: B Envall, B Maund July: S. Box, K. Turner

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc
P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine 3450

Committee: Ern Perkins (Pres), Chris Norwood (V. Pres), Maggie Oliver (V. Pres), Barbara Maund (Sec), Clodagh Norwood (Treas), Kaye Turner, George Broadway, Rita Mills (Newsletter), Ian Higgins, Robyn Holden.

Subscriptions

Student/Pensioner	\$5	Single	\$8
Family	\$12	Supporting	\$15
Newsletter posted:	Subscription plus \$5.		

CASTLEMAINE F.N.C. PROGRAM

Fri 8 June. A WALK THROUGH BLACK HILL. Speaker is Lois Pritchard. 8.00 p.m. at High School.

Sat 9 June. FUNGI. An excursion along the Fryerstown-Taradale Road. Leader: C. Norwood. Leave at 1.30 p.m. sharp from SEC, Mostyn St. Final details will depend on the weather.

Fri 13 July. Mt KOSCIUSKO. Wildflowers of the Snowy Mountains, with Rita Mills and Peter Starr. 8.00 p.m. at the High School.

Sat 14 July. MUCKLEFORD FOREST. Birding in the Muckleford Forest. Leave SEC, Mostyn St at 1.30 sharp. Take your binoculars and bird book. Leader: E. Perkins.

Fri 10 Aug. GROWING AUSTRALIAN NATIVES FOR CUT FLOWERS. Talk by Marilyn Sprague. 8 p.m. at High School.

Sat 11 Aug. One-tree Hill (Bendigo-Mandurang area). Leave S.E.C., Mostyn St at 1.30 p.m.

Sun 19 Aug. TARNAGULLA. Excursion with Maryborough FNC.

Fri 31 Aug-Sun 2 Sept. WYPERFIELD CAMPOUT. W.V.F.N.C.A. campout at Wyperfield, organised by Maryborough F.N.C.

Fri 14 Sept. WALKING IN THE WILDERNESS - SW TASMANIA with Pat Bingham.

Sat 15 Sept. PINK CLIFFS (HEATHCOTE) and MT IDA. Leave from 27 Doveton St at 10.00 am sharp. Take lunch.

Sun 16 Sept. FLAX-LEAF BROOM PULL from the Botanic Gardens, Froomes Road. 10.00 a.m.

Mon 17 Sept. DARGILE FOREST. Excursion with Bird Observers Club - weekday excursion.

Oct 26-28 GRAMPIANS. WVFNCA campout at Churches of Christ Centre, Halls Gap

Sat 3 Nov. KALIMNA WALKING TRACK. 9.30 am. (Cast. Fest.)

Sat 3 Nov. MUCKLEFORD TOUR. 1.30 pm. (Cast. Festival)

Wed 7 Nov. KAWEKA WALK. 6.30 pm with Kaweka Committee.

Fri 9 Nov. THE PREHISTORY OF DISCOVERY BAY (S.W. Vic). Speaker is Michael Godfrey. * p.m. at High School.

Sat 10 Nov. MUCKLEFORD TOUR. 1.30 pm (Cast. Festival)

Sun 11 Nov. KAWEKA WALK. 3.30 pm with Kaweka Committee.